



TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY TECHNOLOGIES & LEARNING FOR IDAHO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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"We have problems. The IEN is the solution"

1 Tell us a little about yourself and your role at Jerome School District.

I was a special education teacher for about 20 years. I first got interested in technology using augmentative and supplemental input methods for my students with severe disabilities. In the middle 80s came the real advent of technology into schools and classrooms and districts began looking for people in their employment that had some technological aptitude. I had left Los Angeles and come to Jerome as the director of special education—this woman I met who had grown up in Idaho convinced me to do it. She later became my wife. One day the superintendent here said to me, "What do you know about those boxes that we're going to put on these desks?" I said, "I think you can wire them together somehow and do cool stuff with them." That's how I became the

Q&A with Chris Gibson,
Director of
Technology for
Jerome School
District

technology guy. And these things grow like mushrooms in the night. For a long while, until early 1990s, I was both the director of special education and technology.

2 What's been your experience so far with the IEN and video conferencing (VTC)?

It has been fantastic. We have students talking dual-credit psychology over the network with the College of Southern Idaho and the Jerome community is beginning to use it. You kind of walk into the VTC lab and it more or less turns on.

It's that simple, seamless and effective. The IEN has made a believer of me.

3 You've experienced some educational technology initiatives such as video teleconferencing before, haven't you?

Yes and unfortunately many of these attempts fell far short of their expectations. The best explanation for their failures could probably be summarized by the realization of our inability to adequately support these projects. "If you build it, they will come" seemed to be the mantra of the day. However, with technology we discovered that merely building it was simply not enough. These data and video networks, along with regional and statewide student data systems require an enormous amount of support. The



Saving Education Dollars, Even at the Very Top

As many of you know, Idaho State Department of Education Superintendent Tom Luna traditionally makes a "Post-Legislative Tour" to each of the six regions after each legislative session. At these sessions, he and school district superintendents, business managers and principals discuss the impact of the legislative session on education. Though an important part of the state's ongoing dialogue on educating our children, the tours are an expense. Because of the state budget crisis, Superintendent Luna has decided to forgo the transportation,



Superintendent Tom Luna

lodging and other travel costs associated with the tour and keep himself and his staff at home. Nonetheless, the tours—just like the all-important educational endeavor—will go on. They will be conducted over the IEN with video teleconferencing, saving the state critical funds.

As always, please enjoy this issue of 214ID newsletter. For dates, locations and other information about the April 6-12 Post-Legislative Tour, please visit <http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/postLeg>.

Garry Lough
IEN Communications
Director

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Veteran Tech Director Excited About the IEN

need for technical support for these systems is obvious. Not so obvious is the subtle promotion and assistance with the creation, scheduling, training and deployment of this content. That support is vital to its success. In another failed venture, Jerome was the hub for a nine-district VTC network. Every classroom was connected by technology, yet there was still a teacher in every classroom. You quickly wonder, “Hmm, why do we have a wire between us?” Nobody’s saving money, nobody’s really collaborating, and it failed. I described it as a solution without a problem.

4 How is the IEN different?

The difference is huge and that’s why I’m so optimistic about the IEN. Number one, there’s statewide support. One of the reasons we failed before was the coordination of schedules and classes. “Oh, you have a pep rally on Friday morning? Well, we don’t because our football team lost.” The schedules didn’t match, the description of

courses didn’t match, the articulation and alignment of courses didn’t match. It was very difficult. The IEN supports and promotes this network and its capabilities. They went to CSI and the two of them generated a psychology course, worked out all the details, and now we have a dozen

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—Chris Gibson, Director of Technology for Jerome School District, ID

kids taking a course that our district didn’t offer. I didn’t have to go out and find it, I didn’t have to promote it, I didn’t have to set it up. The IEN and their vendor ENA do all the work. I’m the director of technology, the chief technician and everything else technical with 2,000 computers to manage.

Chris Gibson, Director of Technology for Jerome School District, ID



I can’t give a whole lot of time to this. With VTC over IEN, I look at the data flow and go, “Whoa, that’s a lot of data, and this thing is running flawlessly.”

I’ve never seen such customer support as I’m getting from ENA. I used to go through several phone numbers trying to get help from our previous provider. These days ENA calls me to see if I need help. One morning at 7:45 a technician shows up and says he heard there was a router out. I looked and, sure enough, he was right. ENA knew before I did. What is that? Has anyone ever heard of that kind of responsiveness? There are no technical issues with the IEN; there are no non-technical issues like curriculum requirements. That’s one-stop shopping at its best.

The second major difference between my experiences before and today with the IEN is that now we have problems that need a solution. My district is looking at budget cuts. We’re looking at transportation



cuts. We're a rural district that wants to offer more courses and better educational experiences to our students but we don't have the instructors or the resources to do it. And we know now that it's more imperative than ever that we give our students 21st century skills. We have to develop critical thinking skills and collaborative skills. These are all big, big problems and we need the IEN to address them.

5 How has technology changed the way young people learn?

Let me use my own children as an example. I have a son that's about to graduate high school. He's a really good kid, in National Honors Society, all that, yet he defines his educational experience this way: "Oh, yeah, I know all the stuff I had to learn in school. But I really learned all the cool stuff on the Internet." Do you know what "jailbreaking your iPhone" is? It's ripping out the Apple OS that came with the phone and putting in your own renegade OS so that you have a whole new world of free, non-Apple capabilities and functionalities available to you. It's legal, by the way. Now,

I'm a pretty hip 60-year-old with a little bit of technical know-how. I get the concept. I would have gone to my desk, looked for instructions online, printed them, got out my yellow highlighter as I read and hours later finished it. How does my son do it? He watches a quick video online, downloads the software to his laptop, and in ten minutes jailbreaks his and his three siblings' phones, all while lying on the couch watching a ballgame. That's how things are done these days. Here's another. My daughter works for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in Seattle. She spends three-fourths of her day collaborating with colleagues and clients over technology that she never sees in person. These are those multi-media 21st century skills I'm talking about.

Look, in the seventh grade we all study the Civil War. We read about battles and generals and all of that. Now that we have the Internet, you can go up to the National Archives and download and read letters written by Union soldiers about the Battle of Gettysburg. You can look at this war through authentic documents. That's 21st century learning. We know that kids learn

this way. They don't learn the way I did. We would be foolish not to utilize these techniques to reach them and teach them the standards they need to learn. Educators have tried lots of concepts in the past. Here's one that really looks like it's going to work.

Jerome School District high school students are taking dual-credit Psychology with the College of Southern Idaho via video teleconferencing over the IEN, the first of many such curriculum-expanding, budget-stretching opportunities the district intends to pursue with the new technology.





IEN Fills the Law Enforcement Training Gap

Last week twenty-two reserve police officers from across Idaho commenced a ten-week certification training course with the Idaho POST (Peace Officers Standards and Training) Academy over video teleconferencing (VTC) equipment on the IEN network. Reserve officers are volunteers that give their service and time without pay and often do so because their small, remote communities have scant resources to pay for more full-time officers

Keeping Idaho safe

Reserve officers are an important if little known asset to Idaho law enforcement says Craig Rhom, POST reserve training coordinator and the instructor who is teaching the course from a VTC lab at the College of Western Idaho in Nampa. "Idaho is a remote, 300-mile by 400-mile state full of small communities that can only afford two or three full-time officers. Those departments can get stretched pretty thin trying to have an officer on duty around the clock. That's where the reserve officer comes into play."

Getting face-to-face training to reserve officers is difficult

Though reserve officers are valuable, it is often difficult to get them the training they need. "Most of them work a regular job and can't get away to the POST's facilities in Meridian," says Rhom. Even if they find the time to get away, there are still travel and lodging expenses. "Remember, these men and women are doing this purely for the love of their communities and to protect their good way of life. They don't get paid and their communities have limited resources."

In the past, the POST has provided training by correspondence, but it is not nearly as effective as face-to-face training. "Training over the video teleconferencing equipment is just what we need," says Rhom. "It has been a huge benefit. The next best thing to being there in person."

The IEN fills the gap

"Reserve officers are usually the last to receive training because of budget limitations," says Garry Lough, marketing director of the IEN. "The IEN is proud to help fill the gap and make this opportunity available to these men and women

Idaho law enforcement officers get critical training and certifications from the Idaho Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST) Academy in both traditional classrooms and remotely over video teleconferencing thanks to the IEN.



who are giving so freely of themselves to preserve the law, order and safety of Idaho."

Reserve officers come from all walks of life. Rhom has trained farmers, ranchers, senior-level executives, dentists, teenagers and retirees. Rhom himself works for a power company and has volunteered as a reserve officer for a decade. He often sees reserve officers become full-time law enforcement officers after a couple years of volunteering.

An important hiring pool

"Reserve officers are an important hiring pool," he says. "Many full-time officers are in the military reserves and have been called overseas to Iraq and Afghanistan. This is a way to backfill those positions. That's my big payoff: when I see people realize that this is what they wanted to do all their lives."

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